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THE MOHAWK LANGUAGE.

BY ORONHYATEKHA,

OF THE MOHAWK NATION.

When I was requested to prepare a paper concerning the language of my people, to be read before your learned body, I readily assented, not because I was not fully sensible of the difficulty of the task, or that I was not painfully aware of my own inability to do a subject of so much importance anything like full justice, but in the hope that I may be able to contribute something which may prove of some assistance to those who may hereafter institute inquiries in the same direction.

It will not be expected, in a short paper like this, that more can be done than merely give a brief introduction to the subject in hand, trusting that future opportunities may be afforded to further prosecute our work. While it is the design to direct your attention mainly to the language, it may not be amiss to give, at the outset, a general outline of the history of the Mohawks.

They are the head tribe of the *Confederacy of the Six Nations*, and, like the other Indian tribes of this continent, their origin is involved in mystery.

The only source which has not been exhausted, from which we can derive any information, at present within our reach, is the Indian traditions. They are, however, so mythical in their character, as touching the origin of the Indian, that but little, if any, reliance can be placed in them. I may say, however, that they all teach that the

red man was created upon this continent; and, were I to weigh the evidence given by these traditions, and that derived from the various theories of scientific writers upon the subject, I should be inclined, after making all allowances for the legendary character of Indian history, to decide in favour of the evidence of tradition, for I am disposed to attach but little weight to theories formed upon supposed similarity in manners and customs, or accidental resemblance, in words, of the language. I do think, however, that there is every reason to hope that we shall find, if not a solution of our difficulty, at least great assistance, from the Science of Language.

I know that the traditions of the Mohawks assume a rational and reliable character, with the formation of the Confederacy of the Five Nations by the Mohawk Chief De-ka-na-wi-dah, yet the Tuscaroras are completely lost sight of in all the earlier traditions of the Five Nations, and are represented to have first met the Mohawks when they joined the Confederacy at a comparatively recent date. An examination, however, of the two languages, leaves no room to doubt that at some remote period these two nations were one.

Here, therefore, we have a case where we are enabled by a knowledge of, and an examination into, the languages, to pronounce judgment with absolute certainty upon a point which goes farther back than tradition. I should be placing a low estimate to say that the Confederacy is 500 years old. Philology, therefore, immediately solves a question for us which is from 600 to 1,000 years old. Leaving, however, the question of our origin for discussion till we are in a position to bring the Science of Language to bear upon it, we will proceed to give a hasty view of the Confederacy of which we have already made mention.

I have said that it was first conceived by De-ka-na-wi-dah, at a time when the nations which subsequently formed the League were living in separate and independent communities, continually engaged in hostilities with each other. The Chief, no sooner thoroughly satisfied that a Confederation of the neighbouring tribes would result in mutual benefit and prosperity, made proposals to the Oneida for an alliance, to which the latter fortunately acceded without hesitation.

They next proceeded to the Onondaga, who at that time was the most powerful of the neighbouring Chiefs. Having received the proposition of the Mohawk and Oneida to form an alliance in which

all would be equal, he rejected them, as he was then more powerful and had more influence than they, and by entering the alliance he would be brought down to an equality with them. Determined, however, to carry out the Confederation scheme, the Mohawk and Oneida tendered the Onondaga the office of "Fire-keeper" in the new Council they would form. This, giving him the sole authority of opening or closing the Councils of the Five Nations, and a *veto* power upon all transactions of the Confederate Chiefs, induced the Onondaga to yield. The Cayugas and Senacas were subsequently added, and thus completed the scheme of Confederation of the Five Nations—a lasting evidence of their wisdom, and that they were entitled to the name of statesmen much more than many "pale-faces" of the present day. From the consummation of this scheme, the "new nationality" steadily though slowly increased in prosperity and power till about the time of the settlement of the English at Jamestown, when they had reached the zenith of their power and glory. Their hunting grounds extended from the great lakes upon the north to the Cumberland River and Cherokee country upon the south and east of the Mississippi.

They subdued nation after nation, till their name was known and their arms dreaded by nearly all Indian tribes east of the Rocky Mountains.

With what has occurred to us since we came in contact with the pale-faces, most of you are familiar, and I need say but a few words. At the time that New Amsterdam changed masters, was formed that alliance with the English which has been kept inviolate by the Mohawks unto this day. The Indians were engaged in all the wars that took place upon this continent for the possession of Canada, between the English and French, and to them England, most undoubtedly, owes her possessions in America. Their fidelity and the strength of their friendship will better appear when it is taken into consideration that they had not only no personal interest to serve, but also tempting offers were frequently made to them by the foes of England, to remain at least neutral. But their invariable reply was, "When my brother is glad we rejoice, when he weeps, we also weep."

At the close of the revolutionary war, the Mohawks, having throughout fought for their brother the King, though the American Government generously offered them the undisturbed possession of

their territory, left their "hunting grounds and the graves of their forefathers," and sought a new home in the wilds of Canada in order to preserve their alliance with their Great Brother the King.

A portion settled upon the shores of the Bay of Quinté, where there are now about 700, while the remainder passed up to their present reservation at the Grand River, numbering at the present day about 2,500. So, again, in the war of 1812, these people gave good evidence at "Beaver Dam," "Lundy's Lane," and "Queenston Heights," that the spirit of their forefathers had not yet entirely died out. As illustrating the "ruling passion," strong even in the din and smoke of battle, the father of the writer, who took a leading part in all the engagements on the Niagara frontier, being present at the burning and sacking of Buffalo, selected from a rich, varied, and costly assortment, as his share of the plunder, *a keg of rum!*

With this bare outline we shall now proceed with our subject proper.

Although all the traditions represent the Six Nations as originally separate and distinct tribes, there can be no doubt of their common origin when we come to examine the dialects.

The migration of a family away from the rest, and living in isolation, would, in time, give us the dialectic differences now existing among the languages spoken by the Six Nations. If this be true, we would naturally suppose that the greatest similarity would be found to exist between the languages spoken by tribes located contiguous to each other; and, on the contrary, the greatest dissimilarity between the languages of tribes that are most remote from each other. On reference to the geographical position of the tribes, we find that, according to this, the Mohawk and Oneida ought to be most alike. An examination will prove this fact, while the Tuscarora differs more from the Mohawk than any of the others; for the Chiefs of the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senacas, speak each in his own language in the Council House, and is readily understood by all; but the speech of a Tuscarora Chief usually has to be interpreted into one or other of the five dialects before it can be understood by the Council.

Our first inquiries must be directed, as a matter of course, to the alphabet of the leading language, viz., the Mohawk, and our attention will at once be arrested by a curious peculiarity in the entire absence of the labials which in English are so prominent.

I ought, perhaps, here to explain that the name Mohawk was given to us by foreigners, and that the signification or derivation is entirely unknown to us. Some writers, I believe, have conjectured it to mean *man eaters*, but if it is implied by this that the Mohawks were cannibals, I have no hesitation in pronouncing it to be a libel.

The name by which we are known among Indians is, perhaps, not quite so euphonious, but much more complimentary. It is *Ka-nyen-ke-ha-ka*, which means "flint-people," or "people derived from the flint," given no doubt by those who had experienced something of the flinty character and the scalping propensities of the Mohawk when upon the war-path.

The following comprises all the letters of the alphabet, viz. :—

VOWELS.

A as *a* in far.
E " *a* " fate.
I " *e* " meet.
O " *o* " old.
U " *u* " tune.

Vowels followed by h have a short, quick, explosive sound, *e.g.* Eh as *e* in met.
Ih " *i* " pin.
E followed by n has the sound of *u* in under.

CONSONANTS.

d h j k n q r s t w x z.

It will thus be seen that b c f g l m p v z are wanting, leaving seventeen letters in the alphabet.

Writers who have gone before me have, as a general thing, retained c and g, but I conceive uselessly, as I think where former writers would employ these letters, j and k could be used quite as correctly.

It will be my object not so much to exhibit the language in some particular form, or according to certain preconceived grammatical notions, as to examine and analyze the language, and afterwards deduce rules founded upon such analysis. With most of the works upon the subject that I have been able to examine, I have found this difficulty, that instead of truly exhibiting the language as it exists, it has been distorted and made to assume new forms to suit the purposes of the author.

In order to indicate the connection between the language of the Mohawks with the other dialects of the Six Nations, I have prepared a comparative table of the numerals, and of a few common words, from which it will be seen that the Mohawk and Oneida are the most alike, while the Tuscarora is most unlike the rest.

	MOHAWK.	ONEIDA.	ONONDAGA.	CAYUGA.	TUSCARORA.
1	En-ska	En-ska	Ska-dah	Skat	En-jih
2	De-ke-nih	De-ke-nih	De-ke-nih	Dek-nih	Ne-ktih
3	Ah-senh	Ah-senh	Ah-senh	Ah-ṣenh	Ah-senh
4	Ka-ye-rih	Ka-ye-lih	Ka-ye-ih	Ke-ih	En-dah
5	Wisk	Wisk	Wiks	Wi-sh	Whisk
6	Ya-yak	Ya-yak	Ah-yak	Nye-ih	O-yak
7	Ja-dah	Ja-dah	Ja-dah	Ja-dak	Ga-nah
8	Sa-de-konh	De-ke-ronh	De-kenh	De-krunh	Na-krunh
9	Tyo-donh	Wa-deh	Wa-donh	Dyo-ton	Ni-renh
10	O-ye-rih	O-ye-lih	Wa-senh	Wa-senh	Wa-senh
11	En-ska-ya-wen-reh		Ska-dah-ka-he	Skat-ska-reh	En-jih-ska-reh
12	De-ke-nih-ya-wen-reh		De-ke-nih-he	Dek-nih-ska-reh	Ne-ktih-ska-reh
20	De-wa-senh		D-ə-wa-senh	De-wa-senh	Ne-wa-senh
21	De-wa-senh-en-ska-ya-wen-reh		De-wa-senh-ska-dah-ka-he	De-wa-senh-skat-ska-reh	Ne-wa-senh-en-jih-ska-reh
22	De-wa-senh-de-ke-nih-ya-wen-reh		Ah-senh-ni-wa-senh	Ah-senh-ni-wa-senh	Ah-senh-de-wa-senh
30	Ah-senh-ni-wa-senh		Ka-ye-ih-ni-wa-senh, &c.	Ke-ih, &c. &c.	En-dah-de-wa-senh, &c.
40	Ka-ye-rih-ni-wa-senh				
50	Wisk-ni-wa-senh				
60	Ya-yak-ni-wa-senh				
70	Ja-dah-ni-wa-senh				
80	Sa-de-konh-ni-wa-senh				
90	Tyo-donh-ni-wa-senh				
100	En-ska-de-wen-nya-weh		Ska-dah-de-wen-nya-eh-weh	Skat-de-wen-nya-woh	Ka-ya-swih
150	En-ska-de-wen-nya-weh-nok-wisk-ni-wa-senh		Similar to Mohawk		
	One hundred and fifty.				
200	De-ke-nih-de-wen-nya-weh		De-ke-nih-de-wen-nya-eh-weh		
Man	Ron-kwe	Lon-kwe	Ha-ji-nah	Ha-ji-nah	Ra-ni-ha
Woman	Yon-kwe	Yon-kwe	E-henh	Kont-swi-sah	Ka-nen-wenh
Boy	Rax-ha	Lax-ha	Hak-sa-ah	Hak-sa-ah	Ra-ka-senh
Girl	Kax-ha	Ex-ha	Ek-sa-ah	Ex-ha-ah	Ya-ken-wa-ston
Husband (my)	De-ya-ke-ni-de-ronh	De-ya-ke-ni-de-lonh	De-ya-ke-ni-ke-onh	Ho-oh (husband)	Ro-ho
Wife (my)	De-ya-ke-ni-de-ronh	De-ya-ke-ni-de-lonh	De-ya-ke-ni-de-onh	De-ya-ke-ni-ya-seh (wife)	Ke-ho
Father (my)	Ra-ke-ni-ha	La-ke-nih	Kh-ni-ha	Ha-nih (father)	Ri-enh
Mother (my)	Is-ten-ah	Ah-ke-nol-ha	Ah-ke-no-ha	Kno-ha (mother)	Kwi-renh

Combined same as in Mohawk, only using *l* wherever *r* occurs in the Mohawk.

DELAWARE.*

1	En-kwi-ta
2	Ni-sha
3	Nghah
4	Ni-wah
5	Nau-lon
6	En-kwi-tash
7	Ni-shash
8	Nghash
9	Nole
10	Wi-mbut
11	En-kwi-ta-nih
12	Ni-sha-nih
13	Nghah-nih
14	Ni-wa-nih
15	Nau-lon-na-nich
16	En-kwi-tash-ta-nich
17	Ni-shash-ta-nich
18	Nghash-ta-nich
19	Nole-ta-nich
20	Ta-kwi-na cheh
21	Ta-kwi.na-cheh-wak-en-kwi-ta, &c.
30	Ngheh-nach-kenh
40	Ni-wah-nach-kenh
50	Nau-lon-nach-kenh
60	En-kwi-tash-ta-nach-kenh
100	En-kwi-ta-poh-kenh
175	En-kwi-ta-poh-kenh-wak-ni-shash-ta-nach-kenh-wak-nau-lon
	One hundred and seventy and five.

Man	Lin-non	Father	Noch
Woman	Oh-kwi	Mother	En-gik
Boy	Ska-hen-tson	Son	We-quo-shein
Girl	Oh-kwi-*sis* (little woman)	Daughter	En-da-nish
Husband	Ni-tah-wun-musk	Day	Ki-ish-koh
Wife	Ni tah-wun-musk	Night	Pi-skak

*The writer is indebted for the *Delaware* to an educated young Indian of that tribe (Mr. Albert Anthony). Every possible care was taken to guard against errors, and it is believed that the examples given are as nearly correct as possible.

From the above table we can readily see that the numerals are combined according to the decimal system of notation, and that in the language of the Six Nations they counted as far as ten, and then began to combine, as *ten and one, ten and two,* &c., while in the Delaware language, they counted only as far as five. For, the form *Enquitash* = 6 is evidently allied to *Enquita* = 1, and so of *Neeshash* = 7, and *Neesha* = 2, &c.

Although there does not appear to be much connection between the Mohawk *O-ye-rih* = 10, and *De-wah-senh* = 20, yet when we come to look at the forms for *ten* in the other languages with which it is allied, we readily recognize in *De-wah-senh* the words *De-ke-nih* + *Wasenh*—two-tens.

The addition of the ending *Ya-wen-reh* to *one, two,* &c., to express *eleven, twelve,* &c., is peculiar to the Mohawk and Oneida. The form for the other languages, as in Cayuga,—*Wa-senh-skat-ska-reh,* simply means *ten* and *one piled on* in the sense of added. I am at a loss to trace the Mohawk and Oneida form *Ya-wen-reh.* It may be derived from *O-ye-rih* = 10, but more likely from *De-ya-weu-renh* = *over,* in the sense of overflowing—more than enough. You will have noticed the peculiarity in the Oneida in the substitution of *l* where *r* is used in the remaining dialects. In fact, this seems to be its principal difference from the Mohawk. The initial *R* and *Yor K* seem to have some connection with the gender, as, for instance, *On-kwe* for mankind, in contradistinction from *Kar-yoh* = beast, is changed into man by simply prefixing R, and into woman by simply prefixing Y. So we have *Ex-ha* = child, *Rax-ha* = a boy, and *Kax-ha* = a girl.

Before subjecting a verb through it various forms, it may help us to understand some of the changes which it undergoes, by first looking at the pronouns and nouns :—

		MOHAWK.		(Plural.)	
I	I-ih.	We (two)	Un-ke-non-ha.	We	Un-kynha.
My	Ah-kwa-wenh.	Ours	Un-kya-wenh.	Ours	Un-kwa-wenh.
Me	I-ih.	Us	———	Us	———
Thou	I-seh.	You (two)	Se-non-ha.	You	Jon-ha.
Thy	Sa-wenh.	Yours	Ja-wenh.	Yours	Se-wa-wenh.
He	Ra-on-ha.	They (two)	Ro-non-ha.	They	Ro-non-ha.
His	Ra-o-wenh.	Theirs	Ra-o-na-wenh.	Theirs	Ra-o-na-wenh.

Dual and Plural.

She or it	A-on-ha.	They	O-non-ha.
Hers or its	A-o-wenh.	Theirs	A-o-na-wenh.

There is another form for *she* and *hers* applied to those for whom we entertain love, respect, or esteem, viz., she = Ah-ka-on-ha ; hers = Ah-ko-wenh, in which we have introduced the *k* we have already mentioned as having some connection with the feminine gender. There is but one form for the nominative and accusative cases. But the chief peculiarity is the existence of a dual element : as, however, we shall see this more clearly when we come to consider the verbs, it may, perhaps, be better to proceed to an examination of the verb before we say anything of this peculiarity of the language.

We shall find great difficulty in our process of analyzing and tracing the words, from the great tendency to agglutination which

exists in all of the dialects of the Six Nations. We shall frequently meet with compound words in which the characters of the original elements are so entirely changed, or so little left of them, that it will require the utmost caution to keep clear of error. It may be better, when such cases occur, not to attempt an analysis, rather than incur the risk of misleading in the matter.

As an example of this tendency to run words together, as well as showing how the possessive of nouns is formed, we have :—

My apple = *Ah-kwa-hih*, which is evidently a compound of the pronoun My = *Ah-kwa-wenh* and Apple = *Ka-hih*, but instead of using the full form *Ah-kwa-wenh* + *Ka-hih*, we have the last syllable of the pronoun and the first of the noun elided, and we get *Ah-kwa-hih*.

So in the second and third persons we have Thy apple = *Sa-hih*, from *Sa-wenh* + *Ka-hih*.

Thy apple	= *Sa-hih*	from	*Sa-wenh* + *Ka-hih*.
His apple	= *Ra-o-hih*	"	*Ra-o-wenh* + *Ka-hih*.
Her apple	= *Ah-ko-hih*	"	*Ah-ko-wenh* + *Ka-hih*.
Her or its apple	= *A-o-hih*	"	*A-o-wenh* + *Ka-hih*.

Dual.		Plural.
Our apple	Un-kya-hih.	Unkwa-hih.
Your apple	Ja-hih.	Se-wa-hih.
Male—Their apple	Ra-o-na-hih.	Male—Ra-o-na-hih.
Neuter or female—Their apple	A-o-na-hih.	Female or N.—A-o-na-hih.

The rule which may be deduced from the above, with reference to the formation of the possessive case of nouns, I think will be found general. In many cases, however, we shall find that the final syllable of the pronominal part of a compound word, or rather of the possessive, is modified, doubtless for the sake of euphony, and according to certain general rules.

Take any number of words, as Bow = *Ah-en-nah*, Arrow = *Ka-yen-kwi-reh*, Tommahawk = *Ah-do-kenh*, Knife = *Ah-sa-reh*, Shoes = *Ah-dah*, and form their possessive cases, and we shall, I think, find that the same general rule applies to all, *e.g.* :—

My bow	Ah-kwa-en-nah.
Thy bow	Sa-en-nah.
His bow	Ra-o-en-nah.
Her bow	Ah-ko-en-nah.
Her or its bow	A-o-en-nah.

In this example we find that precisely the same rule applies as in the first instance given, and we need go no further than the singular,

as the formation of the dual and plural is quite regular. Take the next word, Arrow :—

My arrow	Ah-kyen-kwi-reh.
Thy arrow	Sa-yen-kwi-reh.
His arrow	Ra-o-yen-kwi-reh.
Her arrow	Ah-ko-yen-kwi-reh.
Her or its arrow	A-o-yen-kwi-reh.

Dual.

Our arrow	Un-ke-ni-yen-kwi-reh.
Your arrow	Se-ni-yen-kwi-reh.
Male—Their arrow	Ra-o-di-yen-kwi-reh.
Neuter or female—Their arrow	A-o-di-yen-kwi-reh.

Plural.

Our arrow	Un-kwa-yen-kwi-reh.
Your arrow	Se-wa-yen-kwi-reh.
Male—Their arrow	Ra-o-di-yen-kwi-reh.
Female or neuter—Their arrow	A-o-di-yen-kwi-reh.

Here we have a slight change in the first person singular by the coalescing of the last syllable of the pronominal with the first of the substantive element, and instead of having Ah-*kwa-yen*-kwi-reh, as we should, we get *Ah-kyen-kwi-reh.* We also have a change in the dual, and in all probability this form of the dual is the primary, as far as the two given are concerned, and the more correct form. I think we shall find hereafter, in various forms of the verb, that the *ni* in the first and second persons, and *di* in the third person, is the proper dual element, which we may hereafter be able to trace to *De-ke-nih*, two.

The following are the possessive forms for the remaining three words :—

	Tommahawk.	Knife.	Shoe.
My	Ah-kwa-do-kenh	Ah-kwa-sa-reh	Ah-kwah-dah
Thy	Sa-do-kenh	Sa-sa-reh	Sah-dah
His	Ra-o-do-kenh	Ra-o-sa-reh	Ra-oh-dah
Her	Ah-ko-do-kenh	Ah-ko-sa-reh	Ah-koh-dah
Her or its	A-o-do-kenh	A-o-sa-reh	A-oh-dah

The formation of the dual and plural follow throughout the same rules as the first example given.

It will be seen that in the third person plural there is a variation from the English, in there being a distinction made in Mohawk with regard to the gender of the possessor when such possessor is of the human species.

That arises from there being two forms—a masculine and feminine, for the pronoun *their*. Were we speaking of both genders, as a boy or girl, in the expression "their book," we would use the masculine form.

There is no distinction between the nominative and accusative forms.

Reference has already been made to a masculine, feminine, and neuter gender.

We shall find that the masculine and feminine are confined entirely to mankind, and that the initial R seems to be in some way connected, as already mentioned, with the masculine, while with the feminine, K and Y are used, *e.g.* :—

*R*on-kwe	Man.	*Y*on-kwe	Woman.
*R*ih-yen-ah	My son.	*K*he-yen-ah	My daughter.
*R*ax-ah	Boy.	*K*ax-ha	Girl.

We have already pointed out the existence of two forms of the feminine, confined, I believe, to the singular. There is one form applied to those whom we esteem, as to a mother, and there is a general form, which, perhaps, may be more properly regarded as a *common gender*, and it is the form used when speaking of the beasts of the field, and applied without distinction of gender. This form is used when speaking in general terms of the female sex.

The common gender is confined entirely to the brute creation. Where no masculine or feminine exists, as I stated in the formation of the possessive case, whenever we are speaking of both sexes, as man or woman, we use the masculine, dual, or plural form, as the case may be.

There are in nouns, contrary to what we should expect from what we have seen of the pronouns, only two numbers, the singular and the plural, there being no dual.

The formation of the plural is quite simple and uniform, being effected in two ways, according as the word represents an animate or inanimate being. For the former we add to the singular the termination *o-konh*, *e.g.* :—

Ya-ko-sa-tens = Horse	Ya-ko-sa-tens-*o-konh* = Horses.
On-kweh = Mankind	On-kweh-*o-konh*.

For the inanimates we add *o-kon-ah*, *e.g.* :—

Ah-sa-reh = Knife	Ah-sa-reh-*o-kon-ah* = Knives.
Ah-dah = Shoe	Ah-dah-*o-kon-ah* = Shoes.

There are a few exceptions where the animate form is applied to inanimates, and we may be able, after a more extended observation, to point out the rules that govern these exceptions.

With this brief introduction we leave our subject for some future occasion, and shall close by translating one or two words whose signification may interest you.

The name *Oh-nya-ka-ra*, "on or at the neck," is applied to the whole stream of water between Lakes Erie and Ontario, and is derived from *O-nya-ra*, "neck," or *contraction* between head and trunk.

The Mohawks applied this name to the *neck-like* contraction between the two lakes, and hence we have *Niagara*.

In one of the excursions of the Mohawks, they are reported to have found themselves in the Bay of Toronto. Casting their eyes round, they saw as it were, in every direction, trees standing in the water, hence they called the place *Ka-ron-to*, "trees standing in water," from which, doubtless, you get your Toronto*; while Ontario is supposed to be from *Ken-ta-ri-yoh*, "placid sheet of water."

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* For a reconciliation of the two meanings commonly assigned to "Toronto," viz., "Place of Concourse," *i. e.* populous region, and "Trees standing out of the water," see pp. 74, 75 of "Toronto of Old." "Toronto" as a local name was first applied to the populous region round the lake now known as Lake Simcoe. At p. 76 of the work just named will be found the interpretation of "Sen-aga" and "Mo-aga," according to Pownall, Governor of Massachusetts in 1763, an intelligent investigator in such matters.—[Ed. *Canadian Journal.*]